



News Release

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Walking School Bus Gets Kids to School Safely

(Salt Lake City, UT) – When Elk Meadows Elementary School lost most of its bussing this year, parents took to driving their children across busy Bangerter Highway and dropping them off in front of the school each morning. With a student body of more than 900, that soon added up to lots of cars jamming the parking lot. Today, Elk Meadows is offering a healthier alternative by kicking off a Walking School Bus Program as part of National Walk to School Day, October 6.

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school together with parent supervision. Adult supervision is the key to the program's ongoing success, and helps assure parents that kids will avoid traffic accidents, strangers, and the like. Other benefits include decreasing traffic and air pollution, and giving kids the opportunity to include safe physical activity in their daily routine.

Elk Meadows will have two sites in each neighborhood within school boundaries where parent volunteers will pick students up. "They will start at one end and meet in the middle, and bring them all the way to school," explains School Safety Coordinator Catherine Egan. "Parents are concerned about their kids walking across the highway, and that it's too far to walk, so we'll try this and see how parents take to it."

Elk Meadows Elementary students today will join as many as 50,000 students from more than 110 schools throughout Utah to celebrate National Walk to School Day. More than 3,000 schools from all 50 states will also walk, not to mention schools in 37 countries.

"Walk to School Day is a chance for schools to highlight the many ways that communities can come together to ensure that students have a safe way to walk to school," says Jane Lambert, Community Health Coordinator and Walk to School Day Coordinator, Utah Department of Health. "We want to demonstrate to students and parents that walking to school can be a fun, safe, and healthy experience."

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The event features students, parents, local PTA members, and other community leaders walking along specified routes that lead them safely to school. Special activities associated with the walk include not only walking school busses, but also Gold Medal Mile events, carpooling, pedestrian safety education, and child health and safety activities. In many schools, “Walkability Checklists” are distributed to parents to help them to identify community locations that may be dangerous for students and other pedestrians. The checklist is a tool for community leaders to help make their neighborhoods safer places to walk by improving sidewalks and crossings.

Walking to school is not just a safety issue but a lifestyle choice as well. Moderate, daily physical activity, such as walking or bicycling, has long been recognized as an essential ingredient of a healthy lifestyle. Yet too many Americans, both young and old, lead a sedentary lifestyle. According to a recent survey, the number of trips the average American adult takes on foot each year dropped 42 percent between 1975 and 1995. Among children, walking trips dropped 37 percent. Only 10 percent of public school students are estimated to walk to school today compared to a majority of students a generation ago. And the most common means of transportation to school is by car.

Opportunities for physical activity in schools have diminished. Many physical education classes and even some recesses have been dropped due to shifting priorities. After school, kids are driven to events, to the mall, or to friends’ houses. Add in a daily dose of television, often accompanied by high-calorie snack foods, and it’s no wonder that so many young people find themselves above the recommended weight range.

Walking to school gives students a chance to increase their daily physical activity and maintain important classroom instruction. Walking and other physical activities can help students control their weight, as well as to enhance their feelings of independence and well-being, strengthen growing bodies, and teach valuable lifetime health habits.

For information about Walk to School Day, call Jane Lambert at (801) 538-6241 (office) or (801) 455-4170 (cell), or visit the official web site at www.walktoschool.org. For more information about the Walking School Bus Program at Elk Meadows Elementary, please contact Jana Hudspeth, PTA President, at (801) 446-7253.

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